Overview

Today’s labor market is complex, dynamic, unpredictable, and ever-changing. Thus, looking for work is seldom easy. Blind or visually impaired job seekers, like their sighted counterparts, need to consider certain factors before looking for suitable employment. This course examines the job hunting process as it applies to the U.S. labor market. It suggests strategies that will enable you to undertake an effective job search. Ultimately, the knowledge you gain will increase your chances of achieving your work-related objectives. Familiarizing yourself with this information will enable you to achieve your goal of competently and efficiently seeking employment.

This course, which is divided into six lessons, walks you through the actual job search process. Lesson 1 focuses on your responsibilities as a job seeker. Lesson 2 introduces general labor-market information. Lesson 3 describes various strategies for identifying job leads. Lesson 4 examines the effectiveness of networking. The last two lessons
focus on self-marketing techniques. While Lesson 5 describes the documents that enable you to highlight your skills and accomplishments, Lesson 6 explains how to make the most of job interviews. To help you undertake your own job search more effectively, the course includes appendices that provide employment-related resources and samples of job search documents.

You do not need any prerequisite courses to complete this one. You will, however, need the materials that The Hadley School for the Blind has provided, as well as your own cassette player if you are taking the recorded version. Each new lesson begins on a separate cassette. Every cassette is tone indexed for your convenience: in fast-forward or rewind mode, assignments are identified by a single tone.

Each lesson features self-directed activities followed by suggested approaches. Since these are for your personal development only, do not send your answers to your Hadley instructor. You can always contact your instructor, however, to either
clarify these activities or to discuss your answers. To do so, just call 800-323-4238 any weekday, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Central Time.

You are required to submit the assignment at the end of each lesson. As you complete each assignment, mail it to your instructor at The Hadley School for the Blind, 700 Elm Street, Winnetka, IL 60093.

If you are blind or visually impaired, you may send your assignments in envelopes labeled Free Matter for the Blind provided the assignments are in braille or large print (14 point or larger), on cassette or computer disk. To fax your assignments, or to send them electronically, contact your instructor for further instructions.
Lesson 6: 
Interviewing with Confidence

Recruitment and selection of employees is essentially a people-oriented process. Understandably, employers strive to avoid poor decisions and unnecessary risks. Therefore, they take the time to meet job candidates in person to finalize their hiring options. How, then, can you prepare yourself to interview with confidence?

So far, Lesson 1 focused on taking charge of your job search. Lesson 2 introduced general labor-market information. Lesson 3 suggested strategies for exploring job leads. Lesson 4 described the most effective strategy in job seeking—networking. Lesson 5 examined the self-marketing tools that you can include in your job search. This lesson focuses on interview techniques that you can practice to increase your confidence when you meet employers.

This lesson offers sound tips you can use to modify your approach to interviewing. It explains
how to keep your nervousness in check by looking at the interview process from a different perspective. It also outlines a 10-step strategy that has proven successful for the majority of job candidates. Familiarizing yourself with job interviewing techniques enables you to achieve your goal of seeking employment competently and efficiently.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to
a. Lessen your nervousness
b. Implement the 10-step interviewing strategy

Easing Nervousness

Of all the activities that comprise the job search process, the job interview has generated a substantial number of books, articles, advice columns, and tip sheets. Audiocassettes and videotapes have been produced; moreover, countless speeches and workshop presentations have been made on how to conduct successful job interviews. This is hardly surprising, since most
applicants will likely participate in a job interview before a prospective employer makes a decision.

Feeling nervous prior to any event of personal significance can have its pluses and minuses. For example, if you are scheduled to speak at a national convention, a certain amount of butterflies in the stomach can put you on your toes and heighten your overall alertness. This can be very positive. When those butterflies multiply, however, they can affect your concentration and negatively influence your performance. So, before you walk into a job interview, your natural jitters could raise your physical awareness and mental agility to their optimum levels, as long as you can keep them under control. Certain strategies can help you do just that.

Without a doubt, the prospect of a job interview produces nervousness. Therefore, this section focuses on preparing yourself for job interviews. It offers tips on disclosing your visual disability and increasing your self-confidence. It describes how interviews can be mutually satisfying for both
employers and job seekers. Finally, it stresses the importance of maintaining a positive approach.

**Disclosure**

The interview remains the first opportunity for the employer to observe you in action. When would you disclose the fact that you are blind or visually impaired? It depends on the nature of your disability and on the information you’ve gathered about the employer. Only you should decide when to reveal the particulars of your visual condition. Perhaps you feel strongly that an interviewer needs to know ahead of time so that he or she is prepared to meet your unique needs. On the other hand, could premature knowledge prejudice an interviewer against you?

There is no right or wrong approach. Some informal surveys reveal that most employers want to know about a job applicant’s limitations before the interview takes place. Otherwise, mistrust and defensiveness often defeat attempts at openness and honesty. Regardless of your timing, regard the interview as an unmatched opportunity to
demonstrate your strength of character at a critical moment in the employment process.

If you opt to disclose your visual impairment before the interview, look for the right opportunity to do so in a positive manner. For example, you could present a letter from a previous employer or colleague. Such a letter would explain your disability and use the correct language to describe your adaptive techniques. Could a letter attached to your resume achieve the same results? Certainly. In this case, place the letter at the end of the resume so that the employer focuses on your qualifications and experience first.

If the application form includes a voluntary disclosure section, but there isn’t enough space to elaborate, why not offer to discuss the matter in person? You could also explain your visual impairment when the interviewer calls to confirm arrangements. On the other hand, avoid disclosing your visual disability to a third party, like a secretary, since your explanation might be misinterpreted afterward.
Self-Confidence

To a great extent, how nervous anyone feels prior to a job interview mainly depends on how confident the person is. This confidence comes as a result of possessing job-related knowledge and technical expertise. Moreover, it also requires that you have the compensatory skills specific to your visual impairment, and the ability to be as productive as your sighted coworkers. If you are convinced that you can perform a particular job, then confidently use your white cane, braille notes, electronic notetaking device, or other external symbols of your visual condition. Keeping your nervousness in check is feasible when you walk into a job interview armed with self-confidence. This lets you interact with the sighted people around you in a positive manner.

You want employers and interviewers to feel comfortable around you. Realize that many of them will not have firsthand knowledge of what it really means to be blind or visually impaired. You can certainly earn their respect by discussing your visual impairment and describing how adaptive
equipment and techniques enable you to accomplish work-related tasks. Typically, a job seeker’s qualifications alone do not land him or her the job. The general impression with which you leave an interviewer is a significant factor in the hiring decision. Use the time you spend with an interviewer not only to discuss your skills and qualifications but also to demonstrate your competence and self-sufficiency, thus convincing him or her that your disability will not affect your performance.

**Mutual Evaluation**

Much of a job seeker’s nervousness stems from the traditional thinking that the primary purpose of a job interview is for a prospective employer to evaluate a job candidate’s qualifications, credentials, experience, technical expertise, interpersonal skills, and values. In other words, the assumption is that the job candidate is there because he or she *needs* the job, while the prospective employer merely gives or denies the opportunity. Clearly, such an unequal relationship would disconcert most job candidates.
In reality, some prospective employers themselves find the interview process unsettling. Obviously, an employer is looking for a candidate who can meet the challenges of the job. Recruiting someone on the basis of some misguided evaluation can reflect negatively on an interviewer’s ability to judge people, which might affect his or her chances for promotion to supervisory or management positions. An insensitive question, a misguided observation, or a request for information that is not strictly job-related can trigger the filing of a complaint to Equal Employment Opportunity regulators. No organization wants to involve itself in an expensive, time-consuming grievance process.

Don’t automatically assume that interviewers are experts in the recruitment and selection process. Occasionally, you may indeed meet someone trained in interviewing techniques. Such a person would know how to ask all the right questions and draw logical conclusions about your qualifications. More often, though, individuals who handle interviews are line supervisors and managers. While they are qualified in their particular fields,
they may be amateurs when it comes to probing and assessing the work-related interests, values, attitudes, and personalities of job applicants. This is why you can turn the interview to your advantage. Knowledge is power, as it has often been said. If this is true, then the balance of power is in your favor because you know both about yourself and the job through your preparation and research. Be ready, if not to control the interview, then to at least be more actively engaged in giving it relevant focus and direction.

The interview is really a two-way process in which you play an active role, such as by gathering information, analyzing data, and uncovering facts. While the employer evaluates your overall match with the organizational culture, ask questions to find out the scope of the job for which you are applying. For instance, explore the advancement possibilities, management’s expectations, the supervisor’s work philosophy, and the job’s relevance to your goals.

In addition, your blindness or visual impairment will
possibly trigger a discussion that could give you some insight about management and coworker attitudes toward the use of sighted assistants, like readers. At the same time, discuss organizational policies regarding the purchase of specialized equipment and devices. Consider the job interview a two-way exercise, rather than one-way communication. This approach will likely reduce your apprehensions dramatically.

**Positive Attitude**

When people receive rejection letters, they often look inward for the cause of their failure. They automatically assume that they did something during the interview to trigger the rejection. They might ask themselves, “Did my shirt not match the color of my suit?” or “Perhaps I didn’t ask the interviewer enough questions about the company.”

The assumption that selection decisions invariably depend on the job seeker’s performance obviously creates nervous tension. Realize that the decision whether to hire you or not sometimes has little to do with how you impressed the employer during
the interview. From the moment you step off the elevator and greet the secretary to the moment you say good-bye to the interviewer, your performance may be flawless. Still, the final decision could be negative. Why is that?

The hiring decision is made by human beings, so politics, power plays, nepotism, egos, and a variety of other human frailties often get in the way of ideal, rational, and logical decisions based on objective evaluations of the facts and astute observations of the candidates. For example, a personnel manager who has the authority to hire might be forced to hire another candidate for some internal political reason, despite your polished interview skills. Alternatively, the company recruiter who interviewed you on campus might have placed your name at the top of his or her short list of candidates, only to be outvoted by the company president, who gives your dream job to a graduating nephew. Is that fair? No! Is it human? Absolutely! Were you the company president, you might very well have reached a similar decision.
Do not take rejections personally and automatically assume the worst about your performance. Rather, review your notes and refine your interviewing strategy, if necessary. Then use what you’ve learned to shift your focus to another employer.

Job interviews are a significant part of the job search process. This section described how you can alleviate some of the nervousness that accompanies interviewing for a position. It discussed your approach to disclosing your blindness or visual impairment. It offered tips to increase your self-confidence before and during interviews. It encouraged you to engage in two-way communication with an interviewer. Above all, it encouraged you to maintain a positive attitude all along.

**Self-Directed Activity**

Test your knowledge of the material in this section by completing this self-directed activity. Compare your answer with the text that follows. Do not send it to your instructor, however, as this activity is for your personal development only.
Identify two ways to decrease your anxiety about job interviews.

**Suggested Approach**

Since interviewing for a job can bring about a successful conclusion to your job search, present yourself in the best light possible when you meet an employer. You will be less anxious before and during the interview if you are prepared. Your answer may include finding the right approach for disclosing your disability. Thus, you may decide to supplement your resume with a letter from a previous employer or colleague that explains how you accommodate. You could also increase your poise and boost your confidence by preparing questions ahead of time. Doing so enables you to become a more active participant in the interview process.

**Implementing the 10-Step Strategy**

Preparation is the best way to create a favorable impression during a job interview. This can be accomplished by following a set of guidelines that have proven effective for other job seekers. This
section outlines the following 10 critical steps to successful interviewing:

1. Research the company and the job.
2. Establish a friendly rapport with the interviewer.
3. Respond to open-ended questions.
4. Identify at least three good reasons why you should get the job.
5. Ask at least one job-related question.
7. Respond to disability-related questions.
8. Find out the next step in the hiring process.
9. Follow up with a thank-you note or telephone call.
10. Document pertinent information about the interview.

Researching the Company and the Job

It is essential that you know something about the company and as much as you can about the job to make a really strong impression during an interview. Your research gives you information that you can use to comment on the company’s mission
statement and work philosophy, as well as offer some insight on products or services. Researching the job enables you to gather solid evidence that your qualifications match the employer’s requisites. You no doubt impress an interviewer if you can explain clearly how your skills and interests dovetail with the company’s needs. Your thorough research may even let you know who serves on the company’s board of directors and who the key players are on the management team. Sharing this kind of information during your interview would no doubt impress the interviewer.

**Establishing a Friendly Rapport**

Research indicates that the average interviewer makes up his or her mind 30 seconds to two minutes into the interview. Needless to say, the initial positive impression you make is critical to your success. How can you accomplish this? You can make a good impression by establishing a friendly rapport with an interviewer.

First, mind your appearance when you go to an interview or, for that matter, when you pick up or
drop off an application. Wear professional-looking clothes; that is, something that is neither too fancy nor casual. Ensure that your clothes are clean, pressed, fashionable, and age appropriate. If you are not sure of the company’s dress code, a suit or dress slacks and a sports shirt for men might be suitable, while women might opt for a suit, a dress, or a skirt and blouse. Generally, adopt a more formal and conservative dress and you are likely to be received well. Polish your shoes and make sure they are in good repair. Women should wear closed-toe shoes, if possible, as well as stockings. You certainly will not impress an employer unless you are clean and well-groomed. Perfume and aftershave products are offensive to some people, so avoid them when getting ready for an interview.

Whenever you meet people, including the interviewer, smile, shake hands, and introduce yourself. Ask for the other person’s name and use it. The hard-won information you collected about the company and the job now comes in handy as you chitchat with the people you meet. Share your
knowledge of the company and the job with the interviewer, since this underscores the fact that blindness or a visual impairment does not impede self-initiative. Actually, when an interviewer realizes that you know the unwritten social rule about showing interest in another person’s area of work, he or she might focus more on your similarities rather than on your differences.

**Responding to Open-Ended Questions**

Interviewers often use open-ended questions, such as, “Tell me about yourself.” Such questions allow them to quickly discover how much preparation time you devoted to thinking about yourself in terms of employment. Your response enables an employer to assess how articulate you can be under pressure.

Interviewers truly do want information about the job seeker, but only if it is concise and relevant. Therefore, why not rehearse a one- or two-minute answer to this question? Use this opportunity to reveal information that helps the interviewer know you better; for example, mentioning that you are
native to the geographic area or that you went to college nearby. While interviewers cannot legally ask certain questions, they are usually curious; for instance, if you are married or have children. If you have grown children who do not need extensive after-school care or attention when they are ill, why not casually weave this type of information into the conversation? If you own a home nearby, mention this as evidence of your stability and easy access to work. The key to sharing personal information is to highlight something that relates to a positive work habit or attribute, such as dependability or stability.

Interviewers are interested in your educational background, too. Provide a quick synopsis of the major points, such as where you attended school, what you studied, and when you were in school. Again, only share information that sounds positive, like your participation in experiential learning or on-the-job training. Highlight special skills that you’ve acquired, especially if they relate to the kind of work in which you are now interested.
Interviewers certainly focus on work-related accomplishments, particularly in fields that interest them or companies that they know. Give pertinent details of previous jobs, such as skills and work habits. Suggest how your unique combination of skills and experiences could apply to this new environment. Remember the two-minute rule, however, and never let your personal statement surpass it. Give only the highlights and let the interviewer ask additional questions, if necessary.

Share information about a hobby if you can somehow connect it to the targeted job. For example, if you maintain a woodworking shop in your home and are applying for a job as a cabinetmaker, discussing your hobby makes very good sense. It gives evidence of your ability to use woodworking tools and lets an employer know that you are familiar with their operation and upkeep. It is also indicative of your knowledge of safety issues and work space organization. This information would considerably help convince an interviewer that you can perform in a competent manner. If, however, your hobby is collecting
model cars and you are applying as a bank information specialist, it is unlikely that your hobby will directly contribute to your ability to perform.

**Presenting Yourself as an Ideal Candidate**

Why would an employer hire you? Consider the various aspects of the job and provide at least three good reasons why an employer would give your candidacy serious consideration. Your statement would include at least two skill-related reasons. For instance, if you are an exceptionally good keyboarder and the company is looking for a data-entry person, emphasize your keyboarding skills, giving specific examples of speed and accuracy. If you are applying for a job greeting customers at a retail store, mention that you volunteered in a similar capacity at a community theater throughout high school. The key is to know what the employer is looking for and to address his or her needs with relevant information.

Finally, discuss at least one general concern of employers, such as work habits or punctuality. For example, employers often cite the inability to get
along with coworkers as one reason for letting employees go. If you get along easily with other people, state this attribute as one of the reasons you would make a good employee. Likewise, employers deplore tardiness and absenteeism, which slow down work and put the burden for task completion on coworkers. If you are punctual and dependable, emphasize this as another selling point and provide references to previous jobs to validate your statement.

**Asking Job-Related Questions**

For each interview, prepare at least two job-related questions that are not self-serving. In other words, delay asking a prospective employer about your pay rate, vacation days, sick leave, or other benefits. Rather, include questions like, “Will you be my immediate supervisor or would I report to someone else?” “Will you need me to work extended hours or weekends?” or “Do you need someone who speaks another language besides English?”

Satisfying employment means more than fulfilling
your needs. It also entails meeting the needs of the organization of which you are a part. Asking such questions conveys the impression that you care about the organization, and are not merely considering what it can offer you.

**Presenting a Functional Disability Statement**

A well-crafted functional disability statement highlights what you can do rather than what you cannot do. It explains your disability and clarifies your strengths and limitations. It avoids medical terminology since most people are unfamiliar with eye disorders. In other words, state plainly what you can or cannot see. Above all, your functional disability statement gives you the opportunity to present information that helps an interviewer understand your disability.

Use the interview to educate the individuals you meet. For instance, if you can read print, give specific examples of what you can read, like newsprint, regular-print books, large print books, or street signs. Point to items in the room to help the person understand what you actually see. Be
specific; for example, explain that you can see diplomas on the wall but cannot read where they are from, when they were issued, or what they were awarded for. Do you use optical devices like magnifiers? If so, demonstrate how these devices enable you to see. If you use tools that are too cumbersome to bring to an interview, like a closed-circuit television or a reading machine, bring photographs that illustrate their use.

Describe your blindness-related techniques to the interviewer. Explain how you rely on alternative techniques or compensatory skills to accomplish the tasks of daily living. You could specify that you use

- A long cane or dog guide to travel
- Braille for reading and writing
- Speech and/or braille output to access computer information

Helping an interviewer understand your disability enables him or her to see you as a person. By doing so, the individual may recognize that your disability is simply an attribute, not who you are.
Answering Disability-Related Questions

Many prospective employers who interview candidates who are blind or visually impaired are concerned about three major issues—safety, transportation, and access to print information. Your functional disability statement introduced some of this information. It is also important to answer questions that might be on the interviewer’s mind, even if they are unspoken, such as, “Can your handwritten notes be read?” or “Does your computer generate print notes for coworkers who do not read braille?” In this case, explain how a braille notetaker lets you take notes in braille, then describe the system that lets you share written information with print readers.

Moreover, it is essential that you allay your prospective employer’s concerns regarding safety. Provide specific examples, like your accident-free work history or courses that involved using tools and equipment safely. If you participate in activities that others might consider adventurous, like skiing, let the interviewer know. Use a hobby, such as woodworking, to
explain how you use power tools and equipment safely. Address safety concerns competently and early on in the interview process to dispel an employer’s concerns about safety.

Some research, like the DuPont Corporation study entitled *Equal to the Task*, indicates that people with disabilities are less likely to sustain on-the-job injuries than their nondisabled coworkers. If an interviewer indicates an interest in this subject, encourage him or her to visit the DuPont Corporation website for additional information.

Likewise, refer a prospective employer to your state vocational rehabilitation agency for additional information. For example, the Texas Commission for the Blind has published a booklet for employers called *Do the Rules Change When You Hire a Person Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired?* Consult the Resource List for information on obtaining this publication.

Help an interviewer understand how you get around in the community without driving. Do you use public transportation? If so, don’t let the
employer spend the entire interview time wondering how you would get to and from work without a car. If you do not use public transportation, let the interviewer know that you plan to carpool or use a ride service. Share your backup plan in the event your primary transportation system breaks down. While it is not legally required that you discuss this kind of information, an employer is understandably concerned about such a critical issue. In fact, divulging this type of information demonstrates your independence and competence in meeting transportation demands.

Similarly, could your interviewer be wondering how you would navigate the work environment? Don’t let him or her assume that you will need a sighted guide on a regular basis. Describe the techniques you use for orientation and mobility (O&M). For instance, how would you get from your workstation to the rest room, the cafeteria, the boss’s office, or the mail room? Explain the role of an O&M instructor in learning a new environment. At the same time, let the interviewer know that
you will follow the prescribed procedures for emergency situations or natural disasters, like fires, tornadoes, or earthquakes. Anticipate and answer all of the interviewer’s questions, even those he or she forgets to ask, is embarrassed to ask, or is afraid to ask.

**Thanking the Interviewer and Determining the Next Step**

Everyone likes to feel appreciated and this also holds true for your interviewer. Before you leave, thank him or her. Despite the fact that it is a part of the interviewer’s responsibilities, show him or her appreciation for giving you this opportunity to learn more about the job and to share information about yourself. Could overlooking this nicety affect the eventual outcome? Perhaps, but you would never know! In fact, the interviewer may recall your politeness, which could factor into whether or not you are offered the position, since employers look for people who show care and respect toward others.

Last, but not least, discuss the next step in the
hiring process before leaving. If the interviewer will call you, mention that you have an answering machine or provide times when you can easily be reached. If possible, offer to call back, and confirm when it is convenient for you to do so. Find out if there is a closing date by which they anticipate having the job filled, so you can follow up if you don’t hear from them.

Following Up

It is important to follow up after you have interviewed for a position. If you have the resources, your interviewer would no doubt appreciate receiving a thank-you note. This gives you the opportunity to indicate your renewed interest in the job. Your note could mention that you enjoyed meeting the interviewer and his or her colleagues. Offer to return for a second visit to answer additional questions or concerns. If you do not write a note, telephone the interviewer. Call within the week and, again, thank the person for meeting with you. How could you reiterate your interest in the job? Does the interviewer need additional information? A second meeting could let
you both address unanswered questions or provide details you might have overlooked.

If you are not offered a position, follow up with the interviewer nevertheless. You might have the opportunity to inquire about other leads. Ask for some feedback on your performance even if the interviewer appears reluctant to share this kind of information. If you would like to be considered for future positions, declare so clearly. Ask how long the company maintains active personnel files and what you need to do to maintain or update yours. Never give up, and let the interviewer know that you are still interested.

**Documenting Everything**

Keep notes of each interview’s particulars, such as with whom you interviewed, when you interviewed, and where you interviewed. Summarize the outcomes of interviews and include the names and roles of the people you met. Indicate the results of your follow-up calls and letters, as well. Keeping meticulous, accessible records helps you stay organized and active in your
job search.

This type of documentation also helps you build your network. Detailed notes are invaluable when you discover a second or third opportunity in a company where you once interviewed. They can quickly bring you up-to-date on who’s who in the company, which lets you establish rapport when you mention certain details gathered during a past interview.

Careful preparation and practice let you face interviewers with confidence. This section gave you a step-by-step strategy that offers tips and techniques for interviewing competently. The 10 steps that were outlined in this section have proven successful for many job seekers.

**Summary**

The interview is an important aspect of job hunting. In fact, polished interviewing skills may translate into success and help you land a targeted job. Of course, this comes with careful preparation and ongoing practice. To help you face an interview with confidence and aplomb, this lesson
explored how you can ease preinterview nervousness. It also outlined a 10-step strategy that you can apply to all your job interviews.

**Assignment 6**

Complete the following assignment in the medium of your choice. Include your full name, address, and phone number. Also mention the name of this course, Assignment 6, your instructor’s name, and the date you plan to mail this assignment to The Hadley School.

Interviewing successfully involves a significant amount of forethought. Describe how you can establish an effective plan of action in preparation for your job interviews. To do so, briefly answer the following questions to help you undertake this important aspect of the job search.

1. How could you overcome the nervousness that often accompanies job interviews?
2. How would you tell an interviewer a little bit about yourself?
3. What three reasons would you offer to convince an employer that you are an ideal
candidate?

4. What type of information could you share with an employer to address his or her concerns regarding your visual limitations?

5. What type of information should you note after an interview?

Once you have completed this assignment, mail, fax, or e-mail it to your instructor.